China's Support for Indonesia's ASEAN Our Eyes Initiative in Countering Cyberterrorism in Southeast Asia

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Article Info	Abstract
	The ASEAN Our Eyes Initiative (OEI) was established as a regional intelligence-sharing platform in response to the growing threat of cyberterrorism in Southeast Asia. As the initiator, Indonesia has demonstrated regional leadership in promoting collective security based on ASEAN's core principles of identity, nationalism, and strategic integrity. China's increasing involvement in OEI-related activities introduces a complex strategic dynamic. On one hand, China's technological support and intelligence-sharing capabilities have the potential to enhance ASEAN's cyber defense. On the other hand, dependence on external actors may undermine ASEAN's strategic autonomy and weaken its leadership in regional security affairs. This study offers a novel contribution by critically examining the ambivalent role of China in the OEI, an aspect that remains underexplored in current defense literature. Using a qualitative approach through a structured literature review, this research analyzes academic publications, official defense policies, and intelligence-related reports to evaluate both the benefits and risks of China's participation. The findings indicate that while China's involvement can significantly enhance ASEAN's operational capacity in addressing cyberterrorism, it also carries the potential to shift the regional balance of power, thereby threatening ASEAN's identity and independence as a security actor. This leads to clear policy implications in which ASEAN, particularly Indonesia, must establish transparent and rules-based cooperation frameworks to define the boundaries of external engagement. Strengthening intra-ASEAN collaboration and investing in domestic cyber defense capabilities are essential to safeguarding the sustainability of OEI. By maintaining a careful balance between external support and regional sovereignty, OEI can continue to serve as a credible, ASEAN-driven security mechanism. This study recommends enhancing joint oversight mechanisms, legal safeguards, and internal resilience to ensure that the initiative

remains rooted in the region's foundational values of unity, autonomy, and collective integrity.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as the fourth most populous country in the world, faces increasing cybersecurity threats, especially cyberterrorism. In today's digital era, terrorist attacks conducted through cyberspace transcend geographical boundaries and leverage international networks, requiring a more integrated and specific security approach. However, there is still no comprehensive international policy regulating cybersecurity, including protection against cyberterrorism. Indonesia and ASEAN members also experience this gap, and they are increasingly recognizing the need for regional cooperation to address this threat. In this context, defense diplomacy plays a crucial role in maintaining stability in Southeast Asia. ASEAN collectively seeks to strengthen cooperation in addressing non-traditional threats, particularly cyberterrorism, which has the potential to destabilize regional security (Rosy, 2020). Indonesia, as an ASEAN member with high internet penetration, approximately 202 million out of 274 million people connected by 2021, prioritizes cybersecurity as a national and regional diplomatic agenda. Through the ASEAN Our Eyes Initiative (OEI), launched on November 30, 2017, Indonesia spearheaded a mechanism for strategic intelligence sharing among ASEAN countries to strengthen collective capacity in countering cyberterrorism and other cross-border threats (Khadafi et al., 2023; Prajogo, 2022).

OEI is a regional intelligence cooperation framework led by Indonesia and involving six ASEAN countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines, and Singapore. This cooperation specifically emphasizes enhancing joint capacity to combat cyberterrorism through information exchange and coordinated preventive actions. In this regard, China's involvement adds a significant dimension, given its advanced technology, cyber defense expertise, and geopolitical influence in the region. China can strengthen ASEAN's efforts against cyberterrorism by providing technical support, resources, and best practice exchanges (Riswan, 2024). However, ASEAN member states exhibit different stances toward China's involvement in OEI. Countries such as Indonesia and Singapore tend to view cooperation with China as an opportunity to enhance technological and intelligence capabilities. In contrast, others are cautious and concerned that China's role might threaten their digital sovereignty and national cybersecurity autonomy. This diversity of perspectives reflects complex security and geopolitical dynamics within ASEAN, where balancing the benefits of cooperation against the risks of dependence becomes a source of tension requiring careful management.

This tension contributes to the emergence of a security dilemma among ASEAN countries. When one state enhances its cooperation or strengthens its security capabilities with external support — in this case from China — other states may respond by increasing their own security measures to anticipate potential dominance or intervention. This can exacerbate suspicion and trigger unintended security competition, despite all parties sharing the common goal of maintaining regional stability. Managing this security dilemma necessitates effective defense diplomacy within ASEAN, including confidence-building measures (CBMs) implemented through OEI to improve transparency, communication, and trust among members (Khadafi et al., 2023).

On the other hand, China's involvement in ASEAN cybersecurity cooperation through OEI and other forums such as the ASEAN-China Ministerial Dialogue and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) signals China's intent to contribute to regional stability. Nevertheless, this engagement must be understood within the broader context of China's strategic interests, which extend beyond security to include economic influence and digital sovereignty in Southeast Asia (Khoirunnisa, 2022). Therefore, maintaining a balance between cooperation with China and ASEAN's strategic autonomy is of paramount importance. ASEAN defense diplomacy through OEI draws inspiration from the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing model practiced by Western countries, focusing on intelligence exchange as a key to countering cyberterrorism. With China's technological support and the coordination of ASEAN countries, the region is expected to build robust collective resilience against evolving cyber threats.

In the dynamic geopolitical environment and the face of increasingly sophisticated cyber threats, ASEAN-China cooperation through OEI is vital to sustaining regional stability while fostering economic growth and digital resilience. However, ASEAN must ensure that principles of mutual respect, digital sovereignty, and human rights remain foundational to all cybersecurity initiatives (Suharman & Pramono, 2021). Based on this background, this study aims to specifically examine the role of OEI in addressing cyberterrorism in ASEAN, clarify the diverse positions of ASEAN member states regarding China's engagement, and analyze how the security dilemma arises and is managed within this cooperative framework. This research intends to fill the gap in existing literature, which often treats ASEAN and China's cybersecurity cooperation separately without exploring their strategic interaction through platforms such as OEI.

One of the studies highlighted the role of OEI, which focuses on intelligence collaboration to enhance regional security, including cybersecurity. The study shows that OEI has the potential to strengthen information sharing between ASEAN countries in the face of cyber threats. The case study approach used reveals that, despite progress, limitations in resources and coordination between ASEAN countries remain a major challenge. A criticism of the study is that Banerjee and Mackay did not pay enough attention to public and private sector perceptions of the initiative, which could affect the effectiveness of the collaboration (Banerjee & MacKay, 2020). Other research has also examined Indonesia's defense diplomacy in the context of regional cybersecurity. These studies discuss Indonesia's active role in ASEAN cooperation through the OEI and its efforts to strengthen cybersecurity. One study concludes that regional intelligence cooperation is crucial, but trust among ASEAN member states remains a challenge that must be addressed to enhance collaboration. While this study provides an in-depth perspective from Indonesia's standpoint, it has been criticized for not incorporating the viewpoints of other ASEAN countries, which results in an underrepresentation of the challenges of regional cooperation (Astarini & Rofii, 2021).

A separate study adopts a geopolitical perspective, particularly analyzing China's role in ASEAN's cybersecurity development through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). According to Nasir, ASEAN's reliance on China's digital infrastructure poses risks to the cybersecurity independence of its member states. This geopolitical approach provides valuable insight into how international relations shape ASEAN's cybersecurity policies. However, the study does not consider the perspectives of ASEAN countries that favor technological cooperation with China, which could influence how such initiatives are perceived and implemented (Bettani & Ahmed, 2023). Further research has focused on assessing the effectiveness of the ASEAN Our Eyes Initiative. Using descriptive methods and policy analysis, the study evaluates OEI's role in strengthening cybersecurity in

Southeast Asia. The findings suggest that while OEI has been relatively effective, policy and technological harmonization among ASEAN member states remains a major challenge. This study highlights the need for ASEAN to enhance policy coordination to improve the effectiveness of regional cybersecurity cooperation. However, a notable limitation of the study is its lack of discussion on the barriers to policy implementation, particularly concerning regulatory differences across ASEAN member states (Setyorini et al., 2022).

Given this gap in the literature, it becomes crucial to investigate how these two dimensions, ASEAN's intra-regional security mechanisms and China's external influence, interact within a shared framework like OEI. This intersection offers a unique vantage point to understand both opportunities and tensions in ASEAN's evolving digital security landscape. Therefore, this study seeks to address the following research problem: How does China's involvement support or challenge Indonesia's initiation of the OEI in countering regional cyberterrorism within the ASEAN context? The objective of this research is to explore the extent and implications of China's engagement in the OEI, with a focus on Indonesia's leadership and ASEAN's strategic interest in maintaining regional stability while balancing external influence. By approaching the topic through this lens, this study contributes to the existing literature by integrating the perspectives of defense diplomacy, regional cybersecurity, and strategic rivalry into a single analytical framework, providing a more holistic understanding of contemporary cyber cooperation in Southeast Asia.

Based on the gaps identified in previous research, this study is expected to explore how adaptive regulations in ASEAN can support digital innovation while ensuring their positive impact on sustainable development. By evaluating and formulating flexible yet firm regulations, this research is expected to encourage the creation of a solid cybersecurity system in ASEAN and ensure that digital development does not come at the expense of regional stability and security.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design using a literature review approach to explore the dynamics between adaptive regulation (Khoirunnisa, 2023), digital innovation, and sustainable development. The literature review is appropriate for this topic, as it allows for the collection and synthesis of existing knowledge from various academic and policy sources.

Source Selection Criteria

The sources selected for this study include peer-reviewed academic articles, books, government reports, policy documents, and relevant intelligence reports. These sources were chosen based on their relevance to the study's key themes: adaptive regulation, digital innovation, and sustainable development. The selection was made to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter from various perspectives, including regulatory theory, technological innovation, and regional development in ASEAN. Only sources published within the last ten years were considered to ensure that the information reflects contemporary issues and current trends in the field.

Analytical Framework

The analysis follows a thematic approach. Key themes related to adaptive regulation and its role in fostering digital innovation and supporting sustainable development were identified from the literature. The researcher critically examined how various studies

addressed the relationship between regulation and innovation, as well as the impact of these regulatory frameworks on long-term sustainability. This thematic structure enabled the researcher to categorize and interpret patterns, trends, and emerging discussions across the selected literature.

Ensuring Validity and Credibility

To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, this study applied triangulation by incorporating a diverse range of sources and viewpoints. By cross-referencing literature from various disciplines, regions, and regulatory contexts, the researcher sought to minimize bias and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Additionally, only reputable and authoritative sources were included to enhance the reliability of the analysis. The study also ensured that data from governmental and policy-oriented sources were verified through multiple authoritative reports to strengthen its validity.

Comparative Analysis

The desk study also includes a comparative analysis of regulatory policies from different countries or regions, with particular emphasis on ASEAN countries. This comparative analysis aims to highlight how various regulatory approaches have influenced digital innovation and sustainable development in different contexts. By drawing comparisons, the study seeks to uncover patterns and lessons that can inform adaptive policy recommendations within the ASEAN framework. This qualitative analysis aims to provide valuable insights into the potential for adaptive regulations to foster digital innovation while promoting sustainability. The study is expected to provide policy recommendations that are responsive to the needs of digital development, thereby contributing to the achievement of sustainable development goals in the ASEAN region.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To further analyze these findings, this study applies three theoretical frameworks to explain Indonesia's approach within OEI. First, Defense Diplomacy Theory explains Indonesia's efforts to promote regional security through military-to-military cooperation, particularly in cybersecurity and intelligence sharing. Second, Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Theory positions cyber threats and terrorism as regional issues requiring collective ASEAN responses beyond traditional military strategies. Third, Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) are relevant to OEI's intelligence-sharing framework, aimed at fostering trust and transparency among member states in addressing common threats.

Initiated in 2018 by Indonesia's Minister of Defense, Ryamizard Ryacudu, OEI was inspired by the Five Eyes alliance and envisioned as a regional platform to counter terrorism through shared intelligence (Khadafi et al., 2023). Since then, OEI has evolved from a political initiative into a cooperation framework that facilitates regular exchanges among ASEAN countries. Over the years, OEI has achieved modest progress. Several member states have engaged in meetings, technical discussions, and efforts to align intelligence mechanisms. However, its development remains uneven, challenged by varying national capacities, trust issues, and technological gaps. Reflecting on its journey, OEI represents ASEAN's attempt to institutionalize intelligence cooperation in a sensitive security domain. While implementation remains limited, it offers a foundation for deeper regional collaboration. Moving forward, issues of digital sovereignty and dependence on external technologies, such as China's cybersecurity infrastructure, must be carefully

managed to ensure OEI's long-term viability and autonomy. China also plays a vital role in this context, supporting ASEAN initiatives within the framework of regional security cooperation. By emphasizing close diplomatic relations with ASEAN countries, China has contributed resources and technology to enhance regional intelligence capabilities (Kusumawardhana, 2023). This cooperation aims to address shared security threats such as terrorism and the movement of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF), which remain pressing concerns in Southeast Asia (Putri et al., 2021).

However, China's involvement is not without strategic interests. By assisting ASEAN, China strengthens its regional influence and promotes its image as a responsible security partner, particularly in contrast to Western powers. Furthermore, supporting intelligence cooperation allows China to foster interoperability with Southeast Asian countries, gain access to regional threat assessments, and potentially shape the security agenda in ways that align with its broader geopolitical and economic ambitions. In this regard, China's support for initiatives like ASEAN Our Eyes reflects a mutual benefit, as it improves ASEAN's technical capacity while advancing China's regional foothold in the evolving security architecture.

The Joint Statement produced at the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) demonstrates the commitment of member states to unite against the threat of terrorism. In this context, China's role becomes more strategic due to its ability to offer logistical and intelligence support that can strengthen collective action. This approach reflects the principle of collective security, where a threat to one ASEAN member is considered a threat to all. Thus, China's support can enhance ASEAN's position in addressing terrorism threats and improving regional stability (Universitas Indonesia, 2024). Additionally, the Joint Statement emphasizes the importance of cooperation in training and information sharing among member states. Support from China, in the form of monitoring technology and training assistance in counterterrorism and crisis management, can significantly enhance ASEAN's ability to manage these threats. Through joint military exercises and dialogue forums, China and ASEAN can build a more coordinated security capacity while deepening defense diplomacy between the two parties (Rusydi & Radhiansyah, 2024). This cooperation not only strengthens ASEAN's resilience but also signals that the region is ready to collaborate with external powers that respect the principles of non-intervention and sovereignty. However, it should be noted that China's involvement could also raise concerns regarding over-reliance on the country, which might have implications for the region's geopolitical dynamics, especially amid competition between China and Western countries for security influence in Southeast Asia (Shafitri et al., 2024).

There are several challenges related to regional imbalances in terms of military capacity and resources among ASEAN member states. China's involvement in this initiative could help address such imbalances by providing necessary technical assistance and training to countries with limited resources. Nonetheless, ASEAN countries should remain vigilant against potential unilateral actions that could arise due to different interests in this cooperation, which could trigger tensions among member states. Therefore, there needs to be a transparent and collective mechanism in managing this assistance so as not to trigger domination or dependence on any one party, including China. Multilateral oversight involving all ASEAN members is needed to ensure that the assistance provided truly supports collective goals and is not used for specific interests that could lead to internal tensions. In this way, ASEAN can strengthen its solidarity and ensure that cooperation with China remains in line with ASEAN's principles of independence, equality, and non-interference.

The concept of the security dilemma is particularly relevant in the context of counter- terrorism cooperation in ASEAN, where security-strengthening measures by one member state may be perceived as a threat by another, especially if there is a perception that such measures are supported by external forces such as China (Sarjito, 2024). Under the framework of the ASEAN Our Eyes Initiative, which aims to improve coordination and intelligence sharing among ASEAN countries, this security dilemma challenge needs to be carefully managed. ASEAN Our Eyes serves as an important platform to comprehensively identify common threats and coordinate collective responses without raising concerns regarding hidden intentions or agendas among member states. The success of this initiative relies heavily on open communication and transparency among ASEAN members to avoid assumptions or misinterpretations that could worsen the security situation. In this regard, China's role as a strategic partner can make a positive contribution as a mediator. Through the facilitation of open dialogue and consistent information exchange, China can help ASEAN reduce potential tensions, especially by offering bilateral and multilateral communication channels that can deepen trust between countries. In addition, China can also play a role in providing advanced intelligence technology, which, if managed appropriately, can strengthen ASEAN's capacity to monitor and counter terrorism threats without raising concerns of security exploitation. However, ASEAN must ensure that China's engagement does not lead to dependency that could undermine the organization's collective decision autonomy. Strong transparency mechanisms and multilateral oversight under ASEAN Our Eyes are important to ensure that interactions with China are in line with ASEAN's principle of non-intervention. With this approach, ASEAN can leverage China's contribution to strengthen regional solidarity while avoiding the trap of the security dilemma that could potentially destabilize the region.

Overall, China's role in supporting OEI plays a significant strategic role, as its involvement includes not only technical support but also diplomatic support that strengthens ASEAN ties in the face of transnational security threats such as terrorism and radicalization (Manghout, 2024). Technical assistance from China, including the provision of intelligence tools, cybersecurity technology, and counter-terrorism training, adds significant value to the security capacities of ASEAN member states, especially those with limited resources. With this support, ASEAN has the opportunity to build a more robust cooperation framework that is responsive to increasingly complex threats. From the diplomatic side, China's involvement also supports the establishment of closer communication between member countries, which is one of the crucial elements in the success of the OEI (Purwanto, 2024). In this regard, China can act as a catalyst that encourages open dialogue on sensitive issues and reduces potential misunderstandings that could arise from different interpretations of security threats among member states. This diplomatic support allows ASEAN to maintain its regional autonomy while remaining open to positive contributions from external partners in strengthening regional stability.

Through this collaboration, ASEAN seeks to create a more stable and structured security environment where the exchange of information and experience in countering terrorism is more effective. This initiative also allows ASEAN to express its collective solidarity in facing common threats, so that the threat of terrorism is not only the responsibility of individual countries but also a regional issue that requires a unified response. In this context, China serves as a partner that strengthens ASEAN's vision for building collective security, without compromising the principles of non-intervention and equality that underpin ASEAN cooperation (Suharman & Pramono, 2021).

However, challenges remain, especially in terms of maintaining transparency and ensuring that this collaboration does not create excessive dependence on external parties. ASEAN needs to formulate a strong monitoring and evaluation mechanism in OEI to ensure that external support, including from China, is aligned with ASEAN's collective interests and does not lead to domination. With a balanced approach, China's support can serve as a driving force that helps ASEAN optimize its capabilities in creating a safer and more resilient region against terrorism threats.

Although ASEAN Our Eyes already has a good foundation through the initiative proposed by Indonesia, the successful implementation of this cooperation is highly dependent on the commitment of all member countries to work together consistently and trust each other. This is where China's role as a major power can be very influential, given its political and economic influence in the region (Azhar, 2022). Strong and constructive cooperation between China and ASEAN in the OEI can produce positive results for regional security, provided that it is balanced with mutual respect for the sovereignty and national interests of each country (Putri et al., 2021). The OEI has been a strategic step for ASEAN in dealing with common threats. However, its success still requires full commitment from all member states to ensure sustainable and trust-based cooperation. As the initiator of OEI, Indonesia has provided a solid foundation to build an intelligence and information sharing network among ASEAN Member States. The successful implementation of this initiative is largely determined by a common understanding, both in terms of operations and policies, so that each country is willing to be actively and consistently involved in this cooperation.

In this context, China's involvement as a major power in the Southeast Asian region brings significant potential influence, both in terms of politics and economics. China, with its vast resource capabilities and regional influence, can be a partner that helps ASEAN strengthen OEI, particularly in the areas of intelligence technology, cybersecurity, and logistical support. In addition, through its political and economic influence, China can play a role in facilitating the involvement of ASEAN member countries that have limited resources, so that this cooperation can be felt equally by all members. In order for this cooperation to have a positive impact on regional security, ASEAN and China need to uphold the principles of sovereignty and national interests of each country. This respectful approach will minimize concerns regarding potential domination or exploitation, which can arise from too much dependence on a single external power. In this way, China becomes not only a partner but also a supporter that can help ASEAN achieve its collective security goals, without compromising the policy independence of each country. In addition, for this cooperation to be sustainable, a regular evaluation and monitoring mechanism is needed to ensure that all ASEAN members have an equal and transparent role in the OEI. Such multilateral oversight will also help ASEAN maintain solidarity and ensure that interactions with China are in line with agreed principles. Through a constructive and equality-based approach, the OEI supported by China can be an important instrument to realize a safe and stable region, strengthening ASEAN's position as a resilient actor in dealing with the threat of terrorism and other transnational security issues.

The challenges to be faced are not only external, but also internal. ASEAN member states need to address gaps in security resources and capacities, which can compromise the effectiveness of cooperation. With China's support, there is potential to provide the training and resources needed to improve intelligence capabilities in weaker member states. This will help create equity in contributions to collective security and reduce the likelihood of friction between members. In this context, ASEAN needs to continue to

strengthen cooperation in intelligence sharing and collaboration in security operations. By building greater trust among member states, a more effective mechanism to tackle cross-border terrorism threats is expected. Initiatives such as the trilateral patrouille involving Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines in the Sulu Sea are concrete examples of how this collaboration can work (Atamimi & Azzqy, 2020). Additionally, expanding cooperation to other areas, such as joint training, intelligence technology development, and cultural exchange activities, can help strengthen relations between member states. By engaging China as a strategic partner in this effort, ASEAN can leverage more advanced resources and technologies to strengthen its defense and security capabilities.

Finally, through the ASEAN Our Eyes initiative and active support from China, it is hoped that a strong synergy will be created in facing security challenges in the Southeast Asian region (Utami, 2022). In the long run, this collaboration can have a positive impact not only on regional security but also on political and economic stability in the region, which in turn will contribute to sustainable development and people's welfare in Southeast Asia. Through an inclusive and cooperation-based approach, ASEAN and China can jointly face challenges, optimize potential, and strengthen their position on the international stage. To better understand the roles and risks posed by China's involvement in the OEI, a table summarizing key findings is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Visual Summary: China's Roles, Risks, and Recommendations for ASEAN

China's Role	Risks for ASEAN	Recommendations for ASEAN
Technological expertise	Potential over-dependence on China's tech solutions	Diversify cybersecurity partnerships with other global actors
Regional cybersecurity collaboration	Risk of undermining regional autonomy	Strengthen internal ASEAN cybersecurity frameworks
Economic incentives (BRI)	Influence on digital sovereignty	Promote transparent and reciprocal agreements with China
Cyber threat intelligence sharing	Uneven trust among ASEAN members	Establish more inclusive CBMs and increase regional participation

Strategic Intelligence Collaboration in ASEAN Our Eyes

The ASEAN Our Eyes, a form of intelligence cooperation, focuses on the exchange of intelligence information among member states, aiming to enhance collective capacity to counter security threats, particularly terrorism and radicalization. While this initiative offers opportunities to strengthen collaboration and response to common threats, implementing this cooperation is not without challenges. One significant consequence is the emergence of complex dynamics, where member states must strike a balance between the need to maintain security and the imperative to remain transparent in the information-sharing process (Winarto & Sudirman, 2021).

The balance between security and transparency is a key challenge in intelligence cooperation. On the one hand, member states need assurances that sensitive information related to security threats will be exchanged openly and quickly to improve collective response (Satriya, 2023). On the other hand, there is a risk that this information exchange may raise concerns regarding potential misuse of data, privacy violations, or even distrust between member states. These concerns could lead to a refusal to share information, which in turn could be detrimental to the effectiveness of the OEI in dealing with common threats. Therefore, to address this challenge, ASEAN needs to develop a clear and transparent framework for information exchange mechanisms (Caballero-Anthony, 2005). This includes developing guidelines governing the type of information

that can be shared, processes to ensure data security, and measures to protect the identity and privacy of member states. With these guidelines in place, member states can feel more secure in sharing information without worrying about the negative consequences that may arise. Furthermore, ASEAN needs to build trust among members through open dialogue and continuous collaboration (Murray, 2020). Through joint exercises, discussion forums, and other activities, member states can strengthen relationships with each other, which in turn will facilitate smoother and more effective information exchange. The involvement of third parties, such as international organizations or partner countries, can also be a way to strengthen OEI capabilities by providing a broader perspective and building trust among members (Adelia et al., 2024). With a careful and planned approach, ASEAN can overcome the challenges of implementing intelligence cooperation within the OEI, thereby establishing a framework that not only enhances regional security but also upholds transparency and trust among member states (Khoirunnisa et al., 2024). This will be a crucial step in achieving the shared goal of creating a more secure and stable region.

The exchange of intelligence information between ASEAN Our Eyes (AOE) members is a crucial element in enhancing mutual understanding of security threats in the region (Mujianto et al., 2022). However, this path is not without external pressures. As China deepens its engagement through technological and strategic support, the United States is unlikely to remain passive. Given its longstanding interest in maintaining strategic influence in Southeast Asia, U.S. interference, either through competing security partnerships, diplomatic pressure, or intelligence offers, may emerge as a counterweight to China's presence. This geopolitical dynamic could complicate ASEAN's efforts to maintain neutrality and cohesion, presenting a significant challenge in managing extra-regional intelligence collaboration. Navigating these external influences will be crucial to ensuring that OEI remains an ASEAN-led initiative focused on shared regional priorities.

The security and confidentiality of this intelligence information is critical to maintaining the effectiveness of prevention efforts against the threat of terrorism and other security issues (Katuuk et al., 2023). If such information is leaked or misused, there can be serious repercussions, ranging from undermining trust between member states to worsening the security situation in the region. For example, the publication of sensitive information about a particular threat or security strategy could give an advantage to terrorist groups seeking to exploit weaknesses in defense systems, potentially increasing the risk of attack. Therefore, ASEAN needs to develop strict mechanisms to manage and oversee the exchange of intelligence information. This includes procedures to ensure that only authorized individuals have access to the information, as well as clear protocols on how the information should be treated and protected (Pratama, 2024). Training for personnel involved in processing and exchanging information is also essential to ensure that they understand the importance of confidentiality and data security.

In addition, member states need to agree on common standards and criteria for handling intelligence information, ensuring consistency in the way the information is managed. This can help build trust between member states, which in turn will encourage a more active and open exchange of information. By implementing these measures, ASEAN can maintain the security and confidentiality of intelligence information within the OEI, thereby maximizing the effectiveness of collective efforts in preventing terrorism and addressing other security threats (Estiyovionita & Sitamala, 2022). This will support the OEI's ultimate goal of creating a more secure and stable region, as well as enhance the preparedness of member states in facing increasingly complex security

challenges. One important aspect of intelligence cooperation in the OEI is the issue of mistrust between states (Mujianto et al., 2022). This mistrust can arise due to various factors, including a history of conflict, differences in national interests, or even uncertainty regarding the true intentions of a state. The exchange of intelligence information requires a high level of trust between member states, and issues of mistrust can be a serious obstacle. This can create challenges in building trust among member states and requires solid mechanisms to ensure that intelligence information shared is not misused or leaked (Wilujeng & Risman, 2020).

Strong agreements on confidentiality policies and information protection are key in maintaining the sustainability of intelligence cooperation in ASEAN's Our Eyes. Therefore, it is important to build and maintain trust among ASEAN countries as a key to maintaining the effectiveness of intelligence cooperation. Strong security mechanisms, such as confidentiality agreements and information protection guarantees, can help overcome mistrust. In addition, open dialogue, transparency, and mutual understanding between countries can strengthen the foundation of trust within ASEAN Our Eyes.

Ms. Lutia Nia Astri Sutedja's statement highlighted the role of ASEAN Our Eyes as a form of cooperation between ASEAN member states in the field of security intelligence, especially in counter-terrorism efforts (Winarto & Sudirman, 2021). OEI is recognized as an initiative aimed at enhancing intelligence cooperation among ASEAN countries in addressing the threat of terrorism. Through the OEI, ASEAN member states collaborate in the exchange of intelligence information that is crucial to understanding and countering various forms of terrorism threats in the region (Khoirunnisa et al., 2024). This includes a collaborative counterterrorism approach, where countries support each other in analyzing, monitoring, and responding to terrorist activities. Cooperation in security intelligence shows that ASEAN countries recognize the need for a joint response to security threats involving elements of terrorism. The OEI provides a platform for ASEAN countries to support each other in addressing complex and cross-border security challenges in the region.

In the context of intelligence theory, there are two main aspects attached to the role of intelligence (Samad, Y.S & Persadha, 2022). First, intelligence functions as a capability that involves early sensing, known as an early warning system. Second, intelligence can be viewed as an integrated organization within the government structure of a country. As a function, intelligence is responsible for detecting potential threats or changes in security, primarily through the early warning system. As an organization, intelligence has specific responsibilities in collecting, analyzing, and providing relevant information to support the country's security policy. In the ASEAN Our Eyes, intelligence agencies from member states cooperate in clandestine operations to address the threat of terrorism (Mujianto et al., 2022). These clandestine operations include activities conducted in secret to achieve specific objectives, such as the collection of information about terrorists, monitoring of terrorist group activities, and proactive measures to prevent or respond to potential terrorist attacks. The secrecy of these operations is important to maintain the security of human resources and the intelligence methods used.

Through cooperation in clandestine operations, OEI member states seek to improve the effectiveness and response to terrorism threats that threaten regional stability. This operation allows member states to share resources, knowledge, and expertise, so as to conduct faster and more efficient detection and countermeasures against existing threats. This cooperation reflects the shared commitment of ASEAN

countries to protect the security and stability of the region by utilizing a deep and collaborative intelligence approach. However, in conducting intelligence and security operations under frameworks such as OEI, ASEAN member states must remain committed to human rights principles. Actions aimed at countering terrorism or violent extremism must not compromise fundamental rights such as the right to liberty, protection against torture, privacy, and access to due process (Ho, 2019) In this regard, ASEAN must develop clear human rights safeguards within OEI implementation, such as oversight mechanisms, data protection standards, and judicial accountability to ensure that intelligence cooperation does not result in abuse or arbitrary surveillance. Some member states have begun incorporating human rights considerations into their national counter-terrorism strategies, yet regional harmonization remains limited. Without a unified commitment to uphold these principles, OEI risks undermining its legitimacy and could provoke public distrust or even social unrest, ultimately threatening the very security it aims to protect. Therefore, OEI needs to ensure that any clandestine operations are conducted with appropriate transparency and strict accountability. This includes establishing a clear framework of boundaries and procedures to be followed, as well as independent oversight to ensure that actions taken do not violate human rights principles. Constructive dialogue on the conduct of these operations, including consultation with human rights institutions, is also essential to ensure that the rights of individuals remain protected.

Furthermore, engaging civil society in discussions about regional security initiatives such as OEI is essential for fostering transparency, accountability, and public support. While the initiative operates within the realm of intelligence cooperation, its long-term legitimacy depends on how it is perceived by the public, including civil society actors such as NGOs, academics, media, and human rights advocates. Across the region, responses from civil society may vary, ranging from support for stronger anti-terrorism measures to concern over potential human rights violations and lack of oversight. Therefore, ASEAN should proactively involve civil society through regular consultations, public communication strategies, and participatory policy dialogues. Doing so not only increases awareness and understanding of the goals behind OEI but also helps ensure that security measures are aligned with democratic values and public interest. This inclusive approach can enhance both the effectiveness and the social legitimacy of OEI, while mitigating the risk of distrust or resistance from communities across the region.

In the context of intelligence operations involving actions against individuals, it is important to observe the human rights standards set out in the Human Rights-Based Development Approach (HRBA) (Mesfer et al., 2024). This approach focuses on empowering individuals and communities so that they can understand and effectively exercise their rights and develop the capacity to respect, protect, promote, and apply human rights in their daily lives. The HRBA emphasizes that any action taken in an effort to maintain security, including intelligence operations, must be done with due regard for the rights of individuals. This includes guarantees that individuals targeted by the operation will not be subjected to torture, inhumane treatment, or other rights violations. In this context, a human rights-based approach not only requires states to fulfill international legal obligations, but also emphasizes the importance of protecting and respecting the dignity of every person (Hakim & Kurniawan, 2022). By adopting the HRBA, ASEAN member states can ensure that intelligence operations are not only focused on preventing terrorism and security threats, but also uphold human rights principles (Khoirunnisa, 2023). This approach will help to build legitimacy for the actions taken, increase public trust in security agencies, and reduce potential social tensions

that can arise from human rights violations.

In addition, the HRBA encourages states to increase the capacity and training of security and intelligence officers on human rights principles. With a better understanding of human rights, officers will be better able to carry out their duties with ethics and fairness in mind (Nasution & Firmanditya, 2020). This training could also include the development of effective grievance mechanisms for individuals who feel their rights have been violated, so that they have a channel to seek justice. By integrating HRBA principles in intelligence operations, ASEAN will not only be able to improve the effectiveness of responses to terrorism threats but will also create a more inclusive and equitable framework where the rights of individuals are respected and protected. This will contribute to long-term stability in the region, strengthen member states' commitment to creating a safe environment, and promote sustainable and equitable development. The hope is that all forms of intelligence cooperation can contribute to improving regional security in ASEAN, both in dealing with the threat of terrorism and the influence of radicalism, while adhering to human rights principles and maintaining a balance between security and human rights (Khadafi & Zahidi, 2023). In this regard, China's role as ASEAN's strategic partner is also important. China can provide technical support and resources, as well as assist in training and intelligence capacity building for weaker member states (Burgess, 2023), with China's active participation, intelligence cooperation within the OEI can gain access to more advanced technologies and methodologies, increasing effectiveness in detecting and responding to terrorism threats.

Through OEI, the exchange of information and the conduct of clandestine operations by member states' intelligence agencies, with support from China, can create stronger synergies in facing complex security challenges in the Southeast Asian region. This collaboration is an important strategic step in strengthening the capacity of ASEAN countries to respond to various threats, including terrorism, radicalization, and other transnational crimes (Mangku & Yuliartini, 2021). With China's support, member states can utilize more advanced technology and expertise, increasing the effectiveness of prevention and countermeasures against security threats. However, in the implementation of OEI, it is important to ensure that the synergies built do not neglect the principles of human rights. A balance between the need to maintain security and respect for individual rights must be maintained. This means that any intelligence operation conducted should consider its impact on society and ensure that individual rights, such as privacy, liberty, and protection from abuse of power, are protected. To achieve long-term stability and security in Southeast Asia, ASEAN needs to establish a framework that supports transparency and accountability in every operation conducted under the OEI (Winarto & Sudirman, 2021). This includes developing an independent oversight mechanism to ensure that actions taken comply with human rights standards and do not violate individual rights. In this way, the OEI will not only be an effective tool for enhancing regional security but will also strengthen the legitimacy of and public trust in security institutions.

Furthermore, cooperation with China in the context of OEI can also serve as a platform for broader dialogue on security challenges in the region. By engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society and international organizations, ASEAN can develop a more holistic approach in addressing security issues, one that focuses not only on crackdowns but also on prevention, rehabilitation, and sustainable development. Thus, through ASEAN Our Eyes, synergies between information sharing and intelligence operations supported by China can be optimized to create a safer and more stable

environment, where security and human rights can complement each other, support sustainable development, and improve the quality of life of people in the Southeast Asian region (Winarto & Sudirman, 2021). To help clarify and summarize the strategic intelligence collaboration in ASEAN Our Eyes, see Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of OEI Intelligence Collaboration Dimensions

Dimension	Description	Challenges
Information Sharing	Exchange of intelligence to detect and respond to regional threats, such as terrorism.	Trust deficit, risk of data misuse, inconsistent standards.
Clandestine Operations	Secret intelligence missions, surveillance, and monitoring of terror networks.	Requires ethical control, secrecy, and resource sharing.
Confidentiality & Security	Ensuring data protection, limiting access, and preventing leaks.	Requires robust legal frameworks and personnel training.
Trust & Transparency	Building confidence between member states for consistent cooperation.	Distrust stemming from historical tensions and concerns over sovereignty.
Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA)	Ensuring intelligence activities respect rights (privacy, freedom, due process).	Balancing security with rights protections, avoiding public backlash.
Capacity Building	Joint training, resource development, and tech transfer among members.	Disparity among members' capabilities, dependency on external actors.

CONCLUSIONS

The ASEAN Our Eyes Initiative (OEI) marks a pivotal yet complex development in regional security cooperation among Southeast Asian nations. While it draws inspiration from the Five Eyes alliance, OEI operates in a vastly different political and institutional context characterized by ASEAN's non-interference norm, varying national capacities, and a lack of centralized intelligence command. These structural limitations render the effectiveness of OEI both ambitious and precarious. This study reveals that while OEI aspires to promote strategic intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism coordination, it faces critical obstacles that go beyond political will. Persistent trust deficits among member states, differing threat perceptions, and varying levels of institutional readiness hinder the creation of a seamless intelligence ecosystem. Moreover, without standardized legal and operational frameworks, intelligence sharing under OEI risks being ad hoc and politically vulnerable.

The inclusion of external actors such as China further complicates this landscape. Although China's technical assistance offers capacity-building opportunities, it also introduces concerns over strategic dependency and geopolitical leverage. This opens up space for rivalry, particularly with the United States, which may use its existing security alliances in the region to counterbalance China's influence. These extra-regional dynamics may pressure ASEAN to navigate intelligence cooperation within contested spheres of influence, potentially undermining the unity and autonomy of the initiative. Finally, this cooperation must not disregard the human rights implications of intelligence activities. Without strong accountability mechanisms and civil society engagement, OEI may unintentionally contribute to surveillance abuse or erode public trust in state institutions. Therefore, the criticality of OEI lies not merely in its formation but in its

ability to evolve into a transparent, inclusive, and resilient security framework. Addressing its structural weaknesses and political sensitivities will determine whether OEI becomes a transformative force or remains a symbolic gesture in ASEAN's regional security architecture.

Recommendations

In terms of policy recommendations, it is essential for ASEAN to:

1. Strengthen trust-building measures among member states to overcome the security dilemma and enhance information sharing.
2. Ensure the integration of human rights protections into intelligence operations to maintain legitimacy and effectiveness.
3. Consider China's role as a strategic partner, balancing its participation with the need for ASEAN autonomy and regional solidarity.

Suggestions

Given the increasing complexity of regional security threats, future research should adopt a more reflective and evaluative approach to assess the actual progress and impact of the OEI since its inception. There is a pressing need to move beyond normative frameworks and analyze how OEI has evolved in practice, its milestones, shortcomings, and transformative potential in shaping intelligence cooperation in Southeast Asia. Comparative studies with similar intelligence-sharing models, such as the Five Eyes or the African Union's CISSA, could help identify best practices and adaptable mechanisms for the ASEAN context. Additionally, empirical research should investigate the real-world outcomes of OEI in combating transnational threats like terrorism, cybercrime, and violent extremism. Field-based data collection, interviews with practitioners, and policy impact assessments would contribute to a richer understanding of AOE's operational effectiveness.

Another critical area of inquiry lies in examining the geopolitical implications of external involvement, particularly China's role. Future studies should evaluate how such partnerships influence ASEAN's strategic autonomy and whether they bolster or hinder the bloc's cohesion in managing regional intelligence. Finally, to ensure the initiative remains legitimate and inclusive, future research could also explore the response of civil society across member states toward AOE. Their perceptions and engagement levels are crucial in balancing state security needs with democratic accountability. Given the sensitivity of intelligence cooperation in politically diverse societies, this dimension is vital to making AOE both resilient and responsive to the people it seeks to protect.

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